

Countdown to eviction

ON THE MARCH TO



■ Meeting point – protesters gather at Wickford rail station to protest at the impending Dale Farm eviction

Picture: PAUL WATSON

Why move next door is not answer

THE travellers' 11th hour offer to move off Dale Farm was simply not workable, according to Basildon's council leader, Tony Ball.

Site representatives said the "peaceful and sensible solution" was for them to go to the 37 empty legal pitches next door to their camp, near Billericay.

Travellers said they were also prepared to then clear Dale Farm themselves.

However, Mr Ball said the proposed solution did not work as there was simply not enough room for all the 86 families next door.

He urged some of them to move there and said the rest

By JON AUSTIN
jon.austin@nqe.com

could go to eight designated plots in Liverpool, or take up offers of council housing.

If not, then the eviction would go ahead as planned next Monday.

Patrick Egan, a spokesman for the site, said: "I offered a peaceful solution that would have saved over £18million. He said no."

"That only goes to prove that this is not a green belt issue, but a racist issue. £18million to make sick and elderly homeless, over 100 children taken out school, how can this be justified especially as I offered a peaceful and sensible solution?"



■ Protest – Richard Howitt MEP with traveller children BA49085_12

According to the council, it cannot realistically hold off the eviction, as if there were problems or delays with the travellers offer, it would take months to reorganise and probably not happen until next year.

It also said an expansion of plots at Oak Lane would have to go before the planning committee and there was no time left for that to happen.

Mr Ball said: "We are continuing to urge the travellers to leave peacefully and move onto any legal pitches. This would include Oak Lane, where a number of plots appear to be vacant."

"What we cannot do is expand capacity of Oak Lane, as has been suggested."

"That would fly in the face of every established guideline for how big a traveller site should be and it would also be against the law."

"If Mr Egan is interested in a peaceful solution, he will look at what legal sites are available to the residents of Dale Farm both in and beyond Basildon."

However, if all the travellers did move on the legal site, the council is unlikely to remove any in breach of restrictions quickly. It would have to serve enforcement orders, which could be appealed.

Council leader sad to see protest march

BASILDON council leader Tony Ball was in Wickford High Street, with fellow councillor and former leader Malcolm Buckley as the march passed through.

He said police advised them to keep a safe distance, but he wanted to be on hand to reassure residents and traders.

He said: "There was great anxiety and concern in Wickford."

"The town was quieter because of the march, there were less market stalls and less cars in car parks. Businesses said their trade was down and people had avoided Wickford."

Mr Ball said the one of his overriding feelings from the day was sadness.

He said: "It saddened me to see police on horseback and riot vans, that's not what Wickford is about."

He rejected travellers' claims that the eviction was a form of racism.

He added: "If this was anyone, or any group, who committed a criminal act by developing without permission, we would have taken the same action. The difference is that other people have eventually taken their buildings down."

Mr Ball said he personally had received e-mails from people up and down the country with the overwhelming majority supporting the council's strong stance.